DN NEWSLETTER issue 45

We are all aware that feed prices are high this winter with scarce and highly priced raw materials. Energy sources, such as wheat and barley are particularly expensive this winter. If you haven't already reviewed your pre-lambing feeding of ewes this is the year to do so.

Ewe Nutrition

90% of ewe nutrition should come from her forage / grazing and we must ensure we do not overfeed concentrate and impact on forage intake. The higher the quality of compound fed the lower the amount and the more successful this feeding will be. This mentality of feeding your ewe will also save you money if utilised correctly.

Sheep Feed Cost Calculations	A	B	
Concentrate price per tonne 2020-21	£287	£313	
Concentrate price per tonne 2021-22	£325	£344	
Amount fed per ewe per day (kg)	0.3	0.25	Twins
Number of days fed	30	30	
Cost per twin lambs reared 2020-21	£1.29	£1.17	
Cost per twin lambs reared 2021-22	£1.46	£1.29	
Difference between years	£0.17	£0.12	
Difference concentrate B and A this year	**-£0.17**		

Objective of Ewe Nutrition

- Optimise conception rate and embryo survival
- Increase lamb numbers and improve survival rate
- Produce stronger, more viable lambs
- Ensure good quality and quantity of colostrum and milk
- Optimise lamb growth rate and the weight of lamb weaned per ewe
- Finish lambs when they are growing most efficiently
- Ensure ewes are healthy and minimise losses
- Reduce flock replacement costs
- Improve flock profitability

Ensuring the ewe is fed adequately around lambing time is crucial for production of colostrum. This in turn is KEY to getting the lamb thriving from birth and performing well through to weaning.

Body Condition

The body condition of ewes is a very important factor in colostrum and milk production and in reduction of health issues around lambing time. Ideally ewes want to be Body Condition Score 2.5-3.5 at lambing, but it is important they do not gain or lose an excessive amount of condition through pregnancy.

Feeding the Rumen

We have to remember that a ewe is a ruminant and she is designed to provide herself with the majority of her needs via the rumen bugs digesting grass and forage. As we get closer to lambing, we may need to SUPPLEMENT the ewe to meet her increased needs for milk and colostrum production. We need to avoid substituting forage and so over feeding MUST be avoided.

If you scan your ewes the feed can be targeted specifically, if not we would recommend feeding for the average ewe with twins.

As we get closer to lambing, and the ewe's needs increase she is clever and her rumen throughput increases. This means she can continue to keep her intakes up but as the feed is moving through quicker we need to make it more digestible. If you know your forage quality you can target the higher quality sources for closer lambing.

If we feed too much to concentrate and for too long we will increase the risk of acidosis which increases the risk of twin lamb closer to lambing. This excess feeding upsets the rumen bugs slows down their ability to digest forage and costs too much.

Protein

With protein the importance is the quality of the protein. The rumen bugs require rumen degradable protein for them to grow and multiply and break down the feed and they receive most of this from grass and grass-based forages. The bacteria that pass out of the rumen once they have past their best become the protein source for the ewe.

As she gets closer to lambing time she needs supplementation to meet her needs and this comes in the form of quality protein sources such as soya.

Lamb birthweight, udder development and milk production depend on meeting ewes needs in late pregnancy. Added benefits of getting the protein right at this stage are reduced worm egg output and less post-lambing breakdown in immunity to parasites.

Feed Space

Trough space is important, ensure 15cm per ewe for ad-lib forage or TMR. If feeding concentrates once or twice a day ensure 45cm per ewe, or even better, scatter the concentrate as long as the floor is clean and dry.

Scattering the concentrate has two benefits in that the ewes take the feed in slowly and they are not pushing to a feed barrier.

Water Supply

Clean, fresh water is essential for a healthy ewe and her rumen. Her requirements for water increase from 2.5 litres post weaning to 6 litres in late pregnancy and 8 litres once lactating. Sheep prefer running water so water sources that change the water regularly are better than big troughs containing stagnant water. Out at grass much of the water comes from the grass unless the weather is particularly dry.

Key Points of Supplementation

Supplementation close to lambing time will be targeted at the milk and colostrum production and lambing success. Big lambs are more likely to occur if ewes have been over fed in mid-pregnancy when placental growth is occurring.

Remember the most important feeding recommendation for ewes is SUPPLEMENT not SUBSTITUTE. Feed the best quality supplementation you can BUT feed less of it.

Dugdale Nutrition

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